

Comings J. M.

**South'n B. M. C. Journal**  
**E X T R A.**

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AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SOUTHERN BOTANICO-MEDICAL COLLEGE,

*box 3 -*

FOR THE FOURTH SESSION,

BEFORE THE FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND CITIZENS,

On the 13th day of November 1843.

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BY I. M. COMINGS, M. D.

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**FORSYTH, GA.**

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## Preliminary Correspondence.

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SOUTHERN BOTANICO-MEDICAL COLLEGE, }  
FORSYTH, December 8, 1843. }

Prof. I. M. COMINGS, M. D.

Dear Sir: The flattering manner in which your Introductory Address, at the opening of the present session, was received by the public generally, and the high opinion which the Students of the S. B. M. College entertain of its merits, have induced them to delegate us as a committee to solicit a copy of the same for publication. Hoping we shall not be disappointed in our request, we subscribe ourselves

Your most obedient servants,

JOHN A. BARROWS,  
JAMES M. HILL,  
J. J. JONES, } Committee.

FORSYTH, December 9, 1843.

To Messrs. J. A. Barrows, J. M. Hill and J. J. Jones, Committee:

Gentlemen,—The address which you have so politely solicited for publication, I submit to your disposal. As it was prepared expressly for your benefit I cannot refuse a request so reasonable.

Accept the assurances of my high regard for you personally, as well as the Class you represent, and believe me

Your obedient servant,

I. M. COMINGS.

## ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN: I appear before you for the first time as a Lecturer, and let me, at the very commencement of those duties that devolve on me, assure you that I feel the great responsibility that rests upon me in laying before you the merits, and in properly discussing and elucidating that branch of Natural Science on which it becomes my duty to Lecture.

My youth and inexperience will be a sufficient shield to me from the shafts of your criticism, and I trust you will extend to me that lenity and forbearance in the peculiar circumstances of my situation require. Remember that but a few months ago I was occupying the seats that you now occupy, listening to the sage instructions of my colleagues. At the solicitations of the honorable Board of Trustees I have been induced to occupy a place among the Officers of this institution. It will be for you to judge of the propriety or impropriety of the choice thus made. I throw myself, therefore, upon your charity; and let me assure you that I shall spare no effort to make my course as interesting and as profitable as possible.

The subject of our study is that wonderful thing, the animal body, and more particularly the *human body*—its construction and qualities, its motions, its arrangements, sufferings, decay, &c. In this most interesting, and surely useful study you have already advanced a certain way. You know the outward form and fashion of the body—you have more or less investigated its internal composition and structure. You have learned much that is known of its various endowments—the uses and actions of its several parts. This amount of knowledge is indispensable to your further progress. It forms a portion only of what you desire to learn, or rather, it is a preparation for the ends you are seeking.

But it is not our object in this Lecture to occupy your attention in remarks on our particular branch of Science; this will come up more appropriately in future discussions. The duties of a Lecturer on Medicine have been most aptly and elegantly expressed by Lord Bacon, as follows: "He should not be, like the ant, collecting all things indiscriminately from all quarters, and using them like provender for his discourses; nor like the spider, who seeks no materials abroad, but spinning his web of speculative doctrines within himself; but rather let him be like the bee, extracting crude honey from various flowers, storing it up in the recesses of his brain, and subjecting it to the operation of his internal faculties, until it is fit to be produced, digested and ready for use." Such, gentlemen, is the course your speaker would be happy to pursue, and such will be his endeavor to keep steadily in view during the series of Lectures we now commence; and we should ill-deserve the Chair we occupy if we did not feel the great responsibility under which we speak to you.

The subjects with which we have to deal are not matters of mere speculative curiosity or intellectual amusement, to be taken up to-day and dismissed with unconcern to-morrow; but they relate to questions of life and death—to sickness and health. The comfort or misery of many families may probably hang upon the notions that each of you will carry from this place. Therefore it is that we feel to be engaged in a very serious undertaking.

Doctrines and maxims, good or bad, flow abroad from a public teacher as from a fountain, and his lessons may become the indirect source of incalculable evil and suffering to hundreds who have never even heard his name.

But amid all the responsibilities, both of teacher and learner, the profession which you have chosen, or which circumstances have prescribed to us, is one with which we may well be satisfied. It has its own peculiar privileges and advantages, and if rightly pursued may prove to each of us a lasting source of mental and moral profit. Our daily vocation tends, by the constant exhibition of

human pain and weakness, to awaken the best emotions of our nature, to foster the benevolent affections and to promote the charities of social life. It affords us continued opportunities of showing kindness to our afflicted fellow-creatures, of manifesting love towards our neighbor. It is, or should, always be free from party turmoil and sectarian jealousy. Pain and danger are the only passports necessary to its good offices. It regards no political differences, and the poor, no less than the rich, are embraced in its ministrations.

The Science of Medicine lays open a more extensive field of useful knowledge, and affords more ample entertainment to an inquisitive mind, than any other branch of Natural History—for Anatomy, Botany, Chemistry and Materia-Medica are all branches of Natural Science, and are fraught with such amusement and utility that the man who entirely neglects them has but a sorry claim either to taste or learning. “If a gentleman has a turn for observation,” says an elegant writer, “Surely the natural history of his own species is a more interesting subject, and presents a more ample field for the exertion of genius, than the natural history of spiders and cockle-shells.” Not that every man should become his own physician: this was an error that our great Medical Father naturally fell into in his first attempt at Medical Reform, and the history of the last forty years has proved that this is impossible, as much so as to make every man his own carpenter, tailor or mason. All we ask is, that men of sense and learning should be so far acquainted with the general principles of medicine as to be in a condition to derive from it more of those advantages with which it is fraught, and at the same time to guard against the influence of ignorance, superstition and quackery. It is among men of strong minds, and those who are in some degree enlightened in the science of physic, that we find the strongest advocates of the Thomsonian Theory and Practice of Medicine; whereas, on the other hand, we have opposition from those completely ignorant of medicine, or those prejudiced and influenced by pecuniary motives. We therefore, as Thomsonians, have the greatest interest in having the community enlightened on the subject of medicine, for the glaring and philosophical truths of our system will then be made manifest to the world.

The true theory of Medicine needs only to be better known in order to secure the general esteem of mankind. Its precepts are such as every wise man would choose to observe, and it forbids nothing but what is incompatible with true happiness and inconsistent with sound reason and physiological facts. A veil of mystery has long over the old school practice of medicine which has rendered it not only a conjectural but a suspicious art. But our system lifts up this veil of mysticism, and throws wide open the avenues to a true knowledge of the healing art. It has removed in some measure from medicine the mystery which has long since been taken from the other sciences.

Any man can tell when a medicine gives him ease as well as a physician, and if he only knows the name and dose of the medicine, it is sufficient to perpetuate the fact; and that man who adds one single fact to the stock of medical observation does more real service to the art than he who writes a volume in support of some favorite hypothesis.

We claim for our practice that it is founded on facts and experience, and our theory, formed from such data, cannot be erroneous; whereas, many of the theories of the old school were formed first, and then facts and observations warped to endeavor to substantiate them; but alas, they have failed. Hence the contradictory opinions and the opposite views and theories advocated by the different authors of the old practice. But our authors all agree. A Thomson, Howard, Comfort, Matisou, Smith, Curtis, Hersey, and others, all agree: though they express themselves in a variety of ways, yet it is all the same. Thomsonism is the same the world over, not only in theory but in practice. The same treatment has been found equally efficacious among the granite hills and frozen regions of my own native Maine as well as among the sunny dales and genial skies of my adopted Georgia. From the North to the South, from the Atlantic to the Pacific—under the burning tropics and amid the icebergs of the frozen poles,

Thomsoian has proved nature's own offspring, and equally applicable to all the maladies incident to poor human nature. It is *this* which has recommended it to the favorable attention of the world, and which has induced millions already to embrace it, and will induce millions more, till not one will be found who will raise a cry against it.

Very few of the valuable discoveries in medicine have been made by physicians. They have generally been the effect of chance or of necessity, and have usually been opposed by the Faculty till every one else was convinced of their importance, and thus they will be the very last to embrace Thomsonism: but we are firm in the belief that they will do this, as the community will demand it, and pecuniary interest as well as every other motive will soon require it.

"If men of letters," says a good author, "were to claim their right of inquiry into a matter that so nearly concerned them, the good effects in medicine would soon appear; such men would have no separate interest from that of the art—they would detect and expose assuming ignorance under the mask of gravity and importance, and would be the judges and patrons of modest merit. Not having their understandings perverted in their youth by false theories; unawed by authority and unbias'd by interest, they would confess with freedom the most universally received opinions in medicine, and expose the uncertainty of many of those doctrines of which a physician does not so much as seem to doubt." No argument can be brought against laying open medicine which does not apply with equal if not greater force to religion; yet experience has shown, that since the laity have asserted their rights of enquiry into these subjects, Theology, considered as a science, has been improved—the interests of real Religion been promoted, and the clergy have become a more learned, a more useful, and a more respectable body of men than they ever were in their greatest power and splendor. Why not, I ask the same reform in medicine? Thomson in Physic is what Luther was in Religion; and I rejoice in the pleasing assurance that the efforts of one will be as universal as those of the other. Of this we have not the uncertainty of the future, but the past and the present give us the most indubitable proof of the assertion.

We all extol the merits of those men who brought Philosophy out of the schools and subjected it to the rules of common sense, but many of the present day never seem to consider that medicine, in the old practice, is nearly in the same condition that philosophy was during the dark ages, and why not improve it by treating it in the same manner? Indeed no science can either be rendered rational or useful without being submitted to the common sense and reason of mankind. These only stamp a value upon science, and if it cannot bear this test it ought to be rejected. This is what we emphatically claim for Thomsonism. We submit its merits to the common sense and good understanding of an enlightened community, and we have no fears of the result.

It should be the object, therefore, of every physician, as much as possible, to free the science from the mystery that has so long enveloped it. Let this be your object, gentlemen, in all your future course, to enlighten the community on the subject of medicine—not only to explain the philosophy and truths of your own system, but, with all due respect to the opinions of others, prove the falsity and danger of that course that is diametrically opposed to the living principle and founded on erroneous theories. Thus diffusing medical knowledge among the people, will not only tend to improve the art and banish quackery, but likewise to render medicine more universally useful by extending its benefits to society.

In the examination of ancient records you will be surprised to find no mention made of mineral poisons as medicines. For hundreds of years after the days of Hypocrates no remedial agents were used but botanical. Virgil, speaking of a celebrated physician who was instructed in his art by Apollo himself, seems to confine the profession to them alone. "*Scire potestates herbarum usumque mendendi maluit*"—to cure disease one need only know the power and use of herbs. It was nature herself that afforded those immediate and salutary remedies, and

seemed to invite mankind to make use of them. Their gardens, fields and woods supplied them with an infinite variety, and why not now? Pliny says that physic was brought by Esculapius into great reputation about the time of the Trojan war; was soon after neglected and lost, and lay in a manner buried in darkness till the time of the Peloponnesian war, when it was revived by Hypocrites and restored to its ancient honor and credit. This may be true in regard to Greece, but in Persia we find it always cultivated and constantly held in great reputation. Xenophen says that Cyrus the Great never failed to take a certain number of excellent physicians along with him in the army. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that it was Hypocrates who carried this science to its highest perfection, for he is still looked upon as the first chief master of the faculty; and if our opposers would adhere more closely to the tenets and practice of the father of medicine they would be more successful, for the old school, so far as theory and practice is concerned, has rather been on the retrograde. Aye, ages have passed away, and no real advancement has been made in this system. Galen, Delsus, Parascelsus, Boethave, Hoffmann, Sydenham, Cullen, Van Helmont, Mageadie, Brown and Rush rose one after another, in the order I have arranged them, each with his own theories and discoveries, and each triumphing over his predecessor. So also with our authors of the present age—Broussais, Eberle, Gregory, Dauglison and a host of others, all will pass away like their theories and be forgotten. But among this galaxy, one name alone outshines all the rest, and like the king of day its radiance obliterates them—that name is SAMUEL THOMSON. His theory will stand the test of ages. Founded on the immutable laws of Nature, it will be as lasting as Nature herself.

The whole Botanic fraternity are derided for paying too much respect to the author of our system. Our opponents triumphantly ask who was Samuel Thomson? and what has he done to be so lauded to the skies—to be so idolized?—For shame, they say, to pay so much respect to an ignorant, illiterate quack and pretender. With respect would we always speak of the mighty dead. These inaural habiliments\* and this solemn paraphernalia bespeak to us that he is no more. Yes, our great medical father is dead. Peace to his venerable manes!—But you ask what has Thomson done? Why he has made new and important discoveries in the healing art, that have been lost to the world ever since the great botanic Hypocrites. He has taught us the folly and inconsistency of taking away the pulsulum of life to support life. He has taught us, too, that stimulation and irritation are not synonymous terms; or, in other words, that Cayenne and Lobelia, though powerful stimulants, will not increase the pulse in fever and other inflammatory diseases. He has also made known to the medical world the virtue of that plant which is indeed the Sampson in *Materia-Medica*, and may be truly said to excel all other medicines known in its medical qualities.—With his master key to medical science he has unlocked the great repository of Nature, and thrown wide open the portals which leads to that temple where is taught the true science of human life. He has so simplified this science that even the most common mind can grasp its beauties and practice its precepts, to the saving of themselves and their households from the power of disease, and to assist nature in her curative process.

He has also shown the fallacy and inconsistency of that doctrine of the old school, “*Ubi virus ibi virtus*,” (where there is poison there is remedy,) and proved incontrovertibly that it is not necessary to bring the patient, by “a murderous course of depletion,” to the very borders of the grave in order to cure him. In short he has taught us that we have only to act as the auxiliaries of nature in the curative process, and that all our efforts should be directed to assist the “*vis medicatrix naturæ*” in all that we do. These truths—these facts—these principles, Dr. Thomson has taught us, and do you now ask why we honor this man? Do you honor a Brown, a Cullen and a Rush, for their discoveries and improvements in

\* The Rostrum of the Lecture Room was dressed in mourning, and the Officers and Students wore badges of crape in respect to the memory of Thomson.

Physic, and yet pass with silent indifference, the more important knowledge made known by Samuel Thomson? "O, consistency, where is thy blush?"

But, says the objector, Thomson was an infidel. But I would ask, what we have to do with the *religious* opinions of Thomson? or any other Medical Reformer. It is Thomson as a Reformer of Medicine, that we extol him. His private character, his religious tenets, his morality, or as a man in any other light than as a Physician, we have nothing to do—nothing to say—nothing to enquire. But as a discoverer in Medicine, or rather as one who brought to light and into practice, truths and principles long lost, or but little understood, we think we are justified in paying him all that respect, which we have hitherto done, and even more, as his theory and practice become more and more universal.

That system of Medical practice which you have met here to study, Gentlemen, is the result of *natural research*. You will perceive as you progress, that it is built on nature's plan, simple but philosophic; of humble origin, but scientific—easily comprehended by the wise and philosophic, but difficult to be understood by the haughty, proud and selfish. It is the wisdom and benevolence of Providence, communicated to the world through the agency of Thomson.

The most indubitable evidence has been given in every place, where the system has been introduced and judiciously practised, that its operations upon the human system, are in unison with natures own efforts, that it stands unrivalled by every system of medicine which has before been introduced. View the system from its infancy; its author was persecuted even unto prison cells. But the system and its founder, have come out tried as by fire, and are triumphing over all opposition. 'Tis true our practice had an humble origin, as its Author had not the advantages of a liberal education—neither did he have large possessions to recommend and establish his greatness—yet, he was a man of *industry, benevolence and usefulness*. He was educated in the school of Nature; here he studied philosophy and medical science, which the wise of this world could not fathom.

Though our system is not the result of four thousand years study, yet, it has withstood the withering blast of a calumniating and persecuting medical fraternity—and is now triumphantly waving its free banners and bidding defiance to hosts of opposers. The wholesome precepts of our system, are now received and practised by the most erudite and sound-minded men of the present age—and we believe ere long, it is destined to rest on the summit of the highest hill of fame, and under its canopy, the destraeted and disappointed enemies will gladly assemble for shelter. 'Tis true, the rage of battle has in a measure ceased, but we boast not that our victory has been won with bloody instruments; but by philosophic research—the power of reasoning and argument, and the success of our practice. The restoring agent has been applied to the afflicted, and it has dispelled the misty delusion of medical tyranny, and given our advocates the freedom to know themselves.

In all our study and examination of the ancient medical authors, we find they soared too high above the object of their pursuit, and wandering too far from the illuminated paths of science, might insensibly fell upon them, and they wandered like ships upon the rolling waves of the Ocean, without a helm or pilot—groping in darkness, seeking for that, which Samuel Thomson, by turning aside from these unfruitful paths which they were pursuing, at length discovered glimmering through the dreary waste of four thousand years; in which time, the deluded followers of pride, fashion and selfishness, have sought their conquests in vain. "Thus, when medical science was enveloped in darkness, and the mantle of superstition had wrapped the medical art in disgrace and error, Thomson seized upon the beacon light of true science, and with it, won the everlasting name of Benefactor. A name that will live in the unceasing pride and gratitude of mankind, until the last twinkling star in the heavens shall cease to glimmer."—"Tho' dead he yet speaketh."

Well, Gentlemen, to spread abroad these glorious truths—to convince the

world of the superiority of the new system over the old, we ought to be more or less acquainted with the old practice and their medicines—the nature and effect of each compound, with the different organs, systems and sympathies of the human frame—because truth has to be opposed to error, mind to mind, argument to argument. It is not enough to call the minerals poisons—but we must show *why* and *how* they become so. It is not enough to say that copious bleeding, severe purging and extensive blistering endangers life and destroys it—we must show *why* and *how* this is done. We repeat therefore, that mind has to meet mind—truth be opposed to error, argument combat argument, and spirit conflict with spirit, with the power of truth in the light of science. Thomson, and Nardin, and Curtis, and Mattison, and every successful man has had this to do—and we must expect it, and prepare for it.

And for this purpose, you have assembled at this Institution, under many difficulties and privations—you have left the endearments of home, and those social circles where you have enjoyed so much happiness, and for four long months have determined to devote your attention and all the powers of your mind, to the acquisition of that knowledge which will prepare you for the duties of your profession.

You are now, gentlemen, just entering upon a wide-extended and difficult branch of science. You are just taking the first steps in medical knowledge.—On the improvement of your time here this session, on the diligence, industry and perseverance you manifest in your studies, during the period you are associated together here, will depend much of your success, happiness and prosperity in your future course. Should you unfortunately misspend the precious hours of this golden privilege you enjoy, forever will you look back with sorrow and regret upon these misspent opportunities. But we hope better things of you.—I know that you will, to the best of your abilities, seize upon the instruction that is daily dispensed from this desk, and thus, by close application and persevering diligence and attention, become workmen of whom we shall not be ashamed.

And let me here remind you, too, that after your studies have closed with us, the world is open before you. Never be satisfied with any attainments you may have made; but let your motto be "*Ercelsior*." Go on, adding from day to day to your stock of useful knowledge, and as you grow old in years, so will you become wise and distinguished in your profession.

It was the custom of a learned Professor, who filled one of the most valuable chairs in the University of Edinburg, when consulted by pupils as to what course of study would be most likely to promote their future progress over the rugged road of professional life, thus truly to direct them: "Study mankind," says he. This advice was good, and included every thing that was necessary.—The study of man, mentally and physically—his animal passions and disposition—the general capacity of his whole frame, anatomically and physiologically, should be began at the beginning of every medical education, and cease only with the professional career. Forget not, then, that you never cease to learn; and while you enjoy the privileges of this Institution, and after you leave it and go out in the wide world to batle disease in its thousand forms, still keep an eye to your own improvement and advancement in medical knowledge. Remember that a few crude, floating ideas of practice will not be sufficient to carry you safely through the vicissitudes of medical life. No, no; but you must go from the sick bed of your patient to your books, and from your books to your patient. Every day of your practice you must garner up in the store-house of your mind the fruits of your observation and experience.

Thus every day of your life, whether engaged in the active duties of your profession or whether seated in this spacious hall, surrounded by your fellow-students, you will be making advancements in science, and will be approaching nearer and nearer to the temple of fame, whose portals stand wide open to you, and through which you will at last be able to enter and thus be honored among the great in this world, and pronounced benefactors of mankind.